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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001750

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: VOTING IRREGULARITIES TAINT REFERENDA

REF: LA PAZ 1658

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: In the run-up to the August 10 recall referenda, opposition politicians drew attention to problems with the voter rolls, pointing to the fact that the Venezuelan-funded free-ID program had targeted areas of Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) sympathizers, increasing the number of registered voters likely to vote for President Evo Morales. The free-ID program was also shown to be riddled with errors (reftel), a situation that was not publicly addressed because the OAS observer team was not able to review the voter rolls before the August 10 elections. Since the election, more allegations of irregularities of varying seriousness have come to light, further tarnishing the Bolivian voting process and causing Bolivians to doubt both their institutions, the electoral court, and their democratic system. End Summary.

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Discrepancies in Exit Polls and Final Results  
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¶2. (C) Although final official results have not yet been released, private polling consultants are questioning the seemingly-large difference between exit poll results and the government's announced results. According to contacts with the Apoyo polling company, the difference between exit polls and final results is usually 3-4 percent in Bolivia. This time, however, some areas are showing discrepancies of as high as eight percent, a situation which causes some polling experts to question whether there has been illegal manipulation of the official vote counts. The polling companies have not been provided copies of the voter rolls by voting location (something that in the past they have been given), further spurring suspicions that the government may be releasing incorrect vote counts. Observers are questioning voting results that give President Evo Morales 100 percent of the vote in some areas, and there is widespread public concern over the "missing middle class"--voters who were expected to vote against Evo but whose votes are not appearing in the final count.

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Problems with Rolls Cause Problems for Voters  
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13. (C) For various logistical reasons (including errors in the Venezuelan-funded free-ID program), a large percentage of registered voters were not able to vote on election day due to errors in the rolls at voting booths. The OAS announced that in 32 percent of voting locations voters who were registered were not able to vote because of problems with the voting rolls, mistakes in the hours of operation, or other reasons. Bolivia Transparente, an umbrella group of volunteer election observers supported by USAID, noted that in roughly eight percent of election locations, the booths were not set up in the first two hours of official voting and that in ten percent of the locations they observed, registered voters with IDs were nonetheless unable to vote. There have thus far been no allegations that these frustrated voters were targeted for exclusion--many of those interviewed were MAS supporters, in fact--but the overall sense of citizens thwarted by bureaucracy has drawn complaints.

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Propaganda Too Close to Voting Areas  
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14. (C) The OAS also noted that in 30 percent of voting locations, electoral propaganda was too close to the voting booths, contrary to Bolivian law. Bolivian law also stipulates that propaganda must cease 48 hours before any election, a time-frame that was ignored by many media outlets--particularly radio--that continued broadcasting ads even up to election day. Bolivia Transparente noted, "various cases of indirect electoral propaganda, through television spots, designed to promote the image and actions of the national government, in contravention of article 114 of the Electoral Code." In a number of cases, Bolivia Transparente also noted that observers from political parties and social groups--who by Bolivian law are allowed to watch the election process to ensure transparency--were barred from entering and observing.

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Violations of the Right to a Secret Vote  
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15. (C) In perhaps the most damaging development, both the OAS and Bolivia Transparente announced that in many locations the voters' right to a secret vote was not upheld. Bolivia Transparente observed 5 percent of voting locations where voters could not vote in private conditions, while the OAS announced that in 9 percent of locations voters were not able to vote in secret. The OAS announced that in some communities it had observed "communal voting", where community leaders decided how the community would vote (pro-Evo, in these cases) and the community members were watched to enforce the "community vote." OAS observer team leader Eduardo Stein discounted the gravity of this situation, excusing it as part of "indigenous culture". Before the election, civic leader and union leaders had announced that their groups' members would be required to vote for Evo or face punishment. Bolivia's legally-mandated secret vote should have ensured that the individuals faced--at worst--only the suspicion of having voted against orders, since a secret vote protects voters and enables them to vote their conscience. In cases--such as that reported by Unitel TV in the indigenous militia stronghold of Achacachi--where the ballot boxes were taken house to house and people forced to vote publicly, individuals had no protection from the threats of overzealous community-leaders.

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Comment  
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16. (C) The OAS and other observer groups have recommended

that Bolivia review the voter rolls, prompted in part by problems on election day and continued opposition accusations of name and ID number duplication. Although their final report is not in, it seems that the OAS will give the August 10 recall referenda an overall seal of approval. If international observers do not note and criticize errors in the voting process, the errors seen in this election are likely to take place again in future elections. All this comes at a time when the once prestigious National Electoral Court has come under fire for a partisan political drift. As Bolivia currently faces a number of elections in the near-future (more autonomy referenda and a referendum on the constitution which, if passed, would allow President Morales to run for reelection himself), any weakening of Bolivia's voting process is dangerous. End comment.

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